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ABSTRACT

Noting that many middle schools do not pay sufficient attention to the emotional, physical, and social development of their students, this booklet presents characteristics of successful middle school programs, as recognized by scholars in the middle school movement. Each characteristic is accompanied by an explanation of the "what and why," and a further elaboration on its use. Seventeen characteristics are listed and explained: (1) teaming; (2) team teaching; (3) block time; (4) self-contained classrooms; (5) guidance services; (6) creative, exploratory and enrichment experiences; (7) personalized student evaluation; (8) independent study; (9) basic skill repair; (10) community relations; (11) student services; (12) auxiliary staffing; (13) social experiences; (14) physical experiences and intramural activities; (15) continuous progress; (16) a multi-material approach; and (17) flexible schedules. A list of available resources from the Michigan Association of Middle School Educators is included. (AP)

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MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF
MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATORS

SUCCESSFUL CHARACTERISTICS OF A MIDDLE SCHOOL

by

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Focus On:

Successful Characteristics of a Middle School

The State of Affairs in the Middle School Movement

A recent report called **Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century** found that many middle schools do not pay sufficient attention to the emotional, physical and social development of their students.

"Students who are sick, hungry, troubled or depressed cannot function well in the classroom," stated David Hornbeck, chairman of the task force that created the report. He further stated that recent education efforts have focused heavily on high school or early education.

This report, based on nearly two years of research, "estimated that seven million young people — one in four adolescents — are extremely vulnerable to multiple high-risk behavior and school failure. Another seven million may be at moderate risk, but remain a cause for serious concern."

Some of the major criticisms of American Junior High/middle schools include:

- Criticizes ability grouping, putting the "smart" kids in one class, the "dumb" kids in another. "In practice," states the report "this kind of tracking has proven to be one of the most divisive and damaging school practices in existence. Time and time again, young people are placed in lower academic tracks or classes . . . are locked into dull, repetitive instructional programs leading, at best, to minimum competencies."
- Warns that "most young adolescents attend massive, impersonal schools, learn from unconnected and seemingly irrelevant curricula, know well and trust few adults in school and lack access to health care and counseling."
- Ninety-two percent of the high school graduating class had begun drinking alcohol before graduation. Of those, 56 percent had begun drinking in the sixth to ninth grades.
- The proportion of females having sex by 16 has more than doubled over the past two decades and one-fourth of all sexually active adolescents become infected with a sexually transmitted disease before graduation from high school.
- Motor vehicle and other accidents, many associated with substance abuse, are the leading causes of death among those 10 to 14 years old. The suicide rate more than doubled among this age group from 1980 to 1985.

Further evidence, which must be discussed to point out the need for a middle school to meet the emotional, social, physical and intellectual needs of these "emerging" adolescents, includes the following:

- Epstein studies show that almost 90 percent of children ages 12-14 experience little or no brain growth. Yet, most curricula fail to recognize this.
- Another study conducted by the California State Department of Education and the Fullerton, California, Police Department summarized the problems youngsters have to face.

Top Nonscholastic Problems Students Report Today

- Drug Abuse
- Alcohol Abuse
- Suicide
- Rape
- Robbery
- Assault
- Pregnancy

In the same study, they also report the following as a sharp contrast:

Top Problems of Students in the 1940's

- Talking
- Chewing Gum
- Make Noises
- Running in the Halls
- Getting Out of Turn in Line
- Wearing Inappropriate Clothing
- Not Putting Paper in Wastebaskets

The above information points out the seriousness of developing middle school programs to help these transescents understand the problems they will have to face and how they can successfully grow through the transescent stage to the adolescent stage, and hopefully become successful, mature adults.

Furthermore, the American middle school youngsters of the last decade of the 1990's face many pressures. These are pressures of growing up, learning to understand adults (particularly parents and teachers) intellectual growth, and possibility the greatest of all pressures, dealing with the rapid social growth between childhood and adolescence. Therefore, if our middle schools are to develop educational programs to meet the present and future challenges of not only at-risk students but **all** students, then educators should carefully study the following characteristics of an effective middle school. These middle school characteristics were validated by outstanding middle school scholars. They were arrived at by discussion with these knowledgeable scholars in the middle school movement and by analysis of successful, recognized middle school programs. These characteristics have been frequently used in a number of studies to further determine the extent of their implementation in middle schools.

Middle School Characteristics

The following list cites each characteristic, and explanation of the "what and why," and a further explanation of that characteristic and the reasons for its use.

Characteristic	What and Why	Explanation
Teaming	Teaming includes teachers representing math, science, social studies, and English. Each teacher teaches their own subject but plans regularly with other team members.	Teaming provides a first step for staff who may not feel secure in the team teaching approach, but hopefully, teachers will eventually move to the team teaching process. Teaming provides teachers an opportunity to discuss the progress of various students.
Team Teaching	Team teaching provides for interdisciplinary instruction. Units of study are carefully planned so that the important concepts are covered.	Team teaching provides an opportunity to develop interdisciplinary units of study which integrate the various instructional areas. Time must be provided for the staff to write the interdisciplinary units of study and a daily period where the staff can discuss their instructional efforts, and possibly more important, to discuss the progress of their students.
Block Time	Block time may include a teacher who teaches math and science and another staff member teaches social studies and English. The purpose is to cut down the number of teachers each student has and with fewer groups of students permit teachers to get to know individual students better.	Block Time was proposed some time ago for the American junior high school, and it is still viable today for our middle schools. Having a teacher teach for two periods with the same students allows them to get to know their students better. Block time teachers can get together to plan and discuss the progress of various students and to integrate studies in otherwise separate subject areas.

Characteristic	What and Why	Explanation
Self-Contained Classrooms	Self-Contained classrooms should be considered for the sixth grade because most of these students are still at the childhood development stage.	Serious consideration should be given to the sixth graders because of the stage of development they are in. They still need the security of one teacher who gets to know them intimately. The self-contained classroom should also be considered as an **alternative** in the seventh and eighth grades for students who need the security of a teacher.
Guidance Services	The middle school program should include both group and individual guidance services for all students. Highly individualized help that is of a personal nature is often needed. The middle school should provide experiences that assist early adolescents in making the transition from childhood dependence to adult independence, thereby helping them to bridge the gap between elementary school and high school.	The middle school child needs, and should receive, counseling on many matters. Each teacher should "counsel" the child regarding his learning opportunities and progress in respective areas. Each child should be a member of a home-base group led by a teacher-counselor, someone who watches out for his welfare. Puberty and its many problems requires expert guidance for the youngsters so a professional counselor should be available to the individual youngster.
Creative, Exploratory and Enrichment Experiences	The middle school program should include opportunities for students to express themselves in creative ways. Student newspapers, student dramatic productions, student oratorical experiences, musical programs, and other student-centered, student-directed, student-developed activities should be encouraged.	Students should be free to do some divergent thinking and explore various avenues to various possible answers. There should be time allowed for thinking without pressure and a place for unusual ideas and unusual questions to be considered with respect. Media for expressing the inner feelings should be provided. Art, music, and drama provide opportunities for expression of personal feelings.

Characteristic	What and Why	Explanation
Evaluation	The middle school program should provide an evaluation of a student's work that is personal, positive in nature, nonthreatening and strictly individualized. The student should be encouraged to assess his own progress and to help plan for future progress.	A student needs more information than a single letter grade provides, and he needs more security than the traditional evaluation system offers. Traditional systems seem to be punitive. The middle school youngster needs a supportive atmosphere that helps to generate confidence and a willingness to explore new areas of learning. Teacher-student planning helps to encourage the students to seek new areas. Teacher-student evaluation sessions can help to create a mutual understanding of problems. and also to provide a more meaningful report for parents. Parent-teacher-student conferences on a scheduled and unscheduled basis should be the basic reporting method. Competitive letter grade evaluation should be replaced with open pupil-teacher-parent communications.
Independent Study	The program should provide an opportunity for students to spend time studying individual interests or needs that do not appear in the organized curricular offerings.	A child's own intellectual curiosity motivates him to carry on independently of the group, with the teacher serving as a resource person. Independent study may be used in connection with organized knowledge or with some special interest or hobby. The student pursues his work, after it has been defined, and uses his teachers, various materials in and out of school, and perhaps even other students, as his sources. He grows in self-direction through various activities and use of materials of his choice.

Characteristic	What and Why	Explanation
Basic Skill Repair	The middle school program should provide opportunities for students to receive clinical help in further learning basic skills. The basic education program fostered in the elementary school should be extended in the middle school.	Because of individual differences, some youngsters have not entirely mastered the basic skills. These students should be provided organized opportunities to improve their skills. Learning must be made attractive, and many opportunities to practice reading, listening, asking questions, etc. must be planned in every classroom. Formal, specialized instruction in the basic skills may be necessary and should be available.
Community Relations	The middle school should develop and maintain a varied program of community relations. Programs to inform, to entertain, to educate, and to understand the community as well as other activities should be a part of the basic operation of the school.	The middle school houses students at a time when they are eager to be involved in activities with their parents. The school should encourage this natural attitude. The middle school has facilities that can be used to good advantage by community groups.
Student Services	The middle school should provide a broad spectrum of specialized services for students. Community, county and state agencies should be utilized to expand the range of specialists to its broadest possible extent.	Health services, counseling services, testing, and opportunities for individual development (curricular and co-curricular) meeting the interests and needs of each child should be provided.
Auxiliary Staffing	The middle school should utilize a highly diversified array of personnel such as volunteer parents, teacher aides, clerical aides, student volunteers and other similar types of support staffing that help to facilitate the teaching staff.	Auxiliary staffing is needed to provide the individual help students require. A variety of teacher aides or paraprofessionals may be used to extend the talents of the professional staff.

Characteristic	What and Why	Explanation
Social Experiences	The program should provide experiences appropriate for the transescent youth and should not emulate the social experiences of the senior high school. Social activities that emulate high school programs are inappropriate for middle school students. The stages of their social development are diverse and the question of immaturity is pertinent in the planning of activities for this age level.	The preadolescent and early adolescent undergoes changes which affect the self-concept. The younster is in an in-between world, often separate from the family and the rest of the adult world. This is a time of sensitivity and acute perception, a crucial time in preparation for adulthood. This is the age of sex-role identification. The younsters model themselves after a same-sex adult and seek support from the same-sex per group. The youngster needs to be accepted by the peer group. The attitudes of the group affect the judgment of the individual child. There is the necessity for developing many social skills — especially those regarding the opposite sex. There are dramatic changes in activity: slang, kidding, practical joke give and take, etc. Common areas should be provided in the building for social interaction among small groups.

Characteristic	What and Why	Explanation
Physical Experiences & Intramural Activities	The middle school curricular and co-curricular programs should provide physical activities based soley on the needs of the students. Involvement in the program as a participant rather than as a spectator is critical for students. A broad range of intramural experiences that provide physical activity for all students should be provided to supplement the physical education classes, which should center their activity upon helping students understand and use their bodies. The middle school should feature intramural activities rather than lengthy competitive, exclusive interscholastic activities.	Activities that emulate the high school program are inappropriate for the middle school. The stages of their physical development are diverse, and the question of immaturity is pertinent in planning activities for this age level. The wide range of physical, emotional and social development found in youngsters of middle school age strongly suggests a diverse program. The child's body is rapidly developing. The relationship of attitude and physical skill must be considered in planning physical activities consistent with the concern for growth toward independence in learning. The emphasis should be upon the development of fundamental skills as well as using these skills in a variety of activities. Intramural activity involves maximum participation, whereas interscholastic activity provides minimum involvement. There is no sound educational reason for interscholastic athletics. Too often, they serve merely as public entertainment and encourage an over-emphasis on specialization at the expense of the majority of the student body.

Characteristic	What and Why	Explanation
Continuous Progress	The middle school program should feature a nongraded organization that allows students to progress at their own individual rates regardless of chronological age. Individual differrences are at the most pronounced stage during the transescent years of human development. Chronological groups tend to ignore the span of individual differences.	The curriculum built on continuous progress is typically composed of sequenced achievement levels or units of work. As a student completes a unit of work in a subject, he moves on to the next unit. This plan utilizes programmed and semi-programmed instructional materials, along with teacher-made units.
Multi-Material Approach	The middle school program should offer to students a wide range of easily accessible instructional materials, a number of explanations and a choice of approaches to a topic. Classroom activities should be planned around a multi-material approach rather than an exclusively basic textbook organization.	Maturity levels, interest areas and student backgrounds vary greatly at this age, and these variables need to be considered when materials are selected. The middle-school-age youngster has a range biologically and physiologically anywhere from 7 years old to 19 years old. Their cognitive development, according to Piaget, progresses through different levels too (limiting factors include environment, physical development, experiences and emotions). The middle school youngster is at one of two stages: preparation for and organization of concrete operations, and the period of formal operations. These students often have short attention spans. Variation in approach and variable materials should be available in the school program to meet the differing needs and abilities of the youngsters and to help the teachers retain the interest of the youngsters.

Characteristic	What and Why	Explanation
Flexible Schedules	The middle school should provide a schedule that encourages the investment of time based on educational needs rather than standardized time periods. The schedule should be employed as a teaching aid rather than a control device. The rigid period schedule provides little opportunity to develop a program to a special situation or to a particular student.	Movement should be permissive and free rather than dominated by the teacher. Variation of classes and the length of class time as well as variety of group size will help a student become capable of assuming more responsibility for his own learning.

The **Turning Points** report states that ". . . Middle grade schools, junior high, intermediate, or middle schools are potentially society's most powerful force to recapture millions of youth adrift. Yet all too often, they exacerbate the problems youth face." If educators are to improve the life of our transescents, then the implementation of these middle school characteristics can help in a number of respects. In the planning for an existing or a new middle school program, these characteristics can provide criteria for on-going evaluation of ideas or practices. They can also be a vehicle for discussion of middle school education by faculty and jointly with parents, as well as a way of judging progress towards the goal of effective education for the youngsters of a community.

M.A.M.S.E. Resources

CHANGING FROM A JUNIOR HIGH TO A MIDDLE SCHOOL **$24.95**

By Nicholas P. Georgiady and Louis G. Romano

A **filmstrip-cassette** presentation of a model to move from a junior high school program to a middle school program. This model emerged from actual implementation of a middle school in ten school districts in Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio.

THE MIDDLE SCHOOL - A HUMANIZING EFFORT **$21.00**

by Nicholas P. Georgiady, Addie Kinsinger, and Louis Romano

This **filmstrip-cassette** is an excellent presentation of the characteristics of a middle school. Can be used for teacher in-service or for parent groups interested in the middle school.

FOCUS ON INTERSCHOLASTIC SPORTS AND THE MIDDLE SCHOOL **$3.50**

by C. Kenneth McEwin

This focus paper presents the case for and against interscholastic sports, and takes the position that there is no place for interscholastic sports at the middle school.

MIDDLE SCHOOL - POSITION PAPER **$3.50**

by Tony Egnatuk, Nicholas P. Georgiady, C. Robert Muth and Louis G. Romano

This publication was designed to assist one of America's largest school districts to adopt the middle school concept. Later the original position paper was revised to meet our present day needs. Note similarity of recommendations with those of the report **Turning Points, Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century,** Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development.

CRASH COURSE ON PARENTING PRE-ADOLESCENTS **10/$2.50**

by Dolly McMaster

A four-page flyer which informs parents on certain facts about the pre-adolescent and the resulting normal behavior.

FOCUS ON INTEGRATING ART INTO THE CLASSROOM **$3.50**

by Anita Bouth

This publication includes a brief review of brain functioning, suggestions for subject areas to integrate creative expression into the curriculum. Specific lesson plans provided for science, social studies, English, and math. Appendices include classroom materials needed, resource materials and prints, and activities to facilitate cross-over of creative thinking activities.

FOCUS ON MICROCOMPUTERS IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL **$3.50**

by Jean Marlow, Dale Rosene, Joseph Snider, and Don Steer

This focus paper reviews the effective uses for microcomputers in the middle school complete with a valuable listing of resources for teachers.

FOCUS ON SCHOOL CLIMATE **$3.50**

by Thomas Scullen

This manuscript is an attempt to pinpoint the techniques necessary to promote and maintain an excellent organization. Improving school climate begins with the principal, who must accept the challenge of developing a style that accentuates the positive and motivates staff members to do their very best. Practical suggestions are provided to improve school climate.

FOCUS ON CENSORSHIP IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL **$3.50**

by Nicholas P. Georgiady

This focus paper examines the problem of censorship and how middle schools can meet it through careful planning. Excellent resources included.

DO YOU HAVE A MIDDLE SCHOOL **10/$2.00**

by Louis G. Romano, Susan Pressel, Margaret Sandber and Ken Wagner

A checklist designed to help teachers, administrators and parents to determine if a school district has a middle school. It focuses on "The People," "The Instruction," "The Activities," and "The Structure."

EVALUATIVE CRITERIA FOR A MIDDLE SCHOOL **$6.00**

by William Powell and Louis G. Romano

Two years of extensive research provided this self-evaluation tool for middle schools interested in determining if their program is consistent with the middle school philosophy. Covers philosophy, objectives, administration, curriculum, exploratory, guidance, media center, school-community, school plant, school staff, and instructional areas. (Revised 1990)

FOCUS ON MIDDLE SCHOOL PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES **$3.50**

by Alice L. Hamacheck and Louis G. Romano

FOCUS ON TEAM TEACHING **$3.50**

by Robert Cross and Sue Cross

FOCUS ON A MIDDLE SCHOOL BELIEF SYSTEM **$3.50**

by Frank S. Blom, Glen K. Gerard and Addie Kinsinger

FOCUS ON CURRICULUM DESIGN FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Description of growth characteristics of early adolescents and implications for the curriculum. Includes information on brain growth, language, affective, social, aesthetic and physical development.

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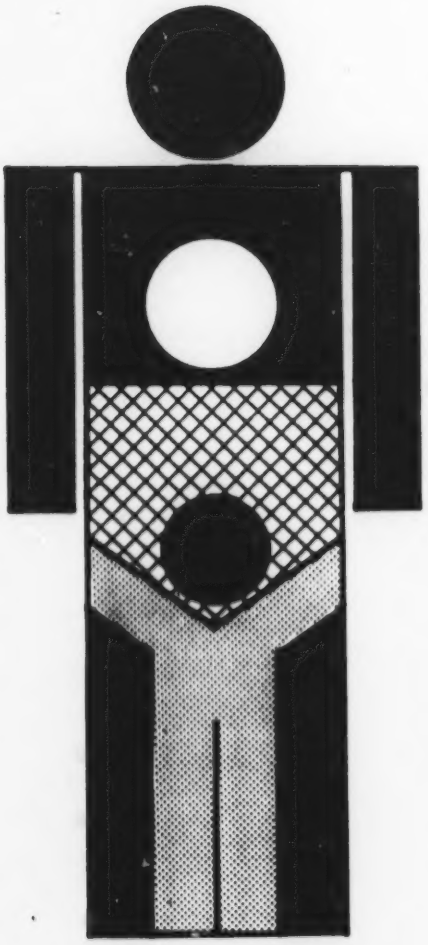

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